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Cobblestones

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Cobblestones

A Book of Poems

by

David Sentner



New York

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1921

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Inscribed
to
Mary Southerland Steele

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The Valley of Lost Steps

I stood nigh the Valley of Steps That Are Lost
And listened to echoes that come and go
Like breezes thru the fingers of the trees.

The tiny step of a toddling child
Who knew not the path ahead;
The jerky beat of a vigorous youth
Who hustled toward quick success;
The clump and thump of an army boot
Which tramped the long, long one-way road
To the parapet in France;
The clodding plod of a routine man
Who followed the rut of environment;
The mincing patter of debutante
Down the Aisle of Life
With its rosy hedges;
The weary, dreary shuffle of woman
Who trudged the sands of a household wilderness.

But as they neared the Valley of Lost Steps
Their cadences were joined
In one vast symphony

As if it were but one
And only one
Who trod in dignity deliberate
Toward the Valley where bare feet
Dance noiselessly on velvet grass.

The Bricklayer

I have been laying bricks
Each upon its brother
For days and months and years
And it is irksome
As sifting the ashes of Hell.

I remember when I was a child
I played with colored blocks
Untiringly
And found it good.

Aristocracy

An oyster in an oyster-bed
Where every oyster held a pearl
Swallowed a diamond.
He bragged about his wealth
Spouting at his fellows
Who could boast only of pearl.
But there came a day
When he was scooped up
Pried apart and robbed
Of both his diamond and his pearl,
Then scornfully thrown back
Into the muddy depth,
Maimed and mangled.
Yet this proud oyster
Became King of the Oysters.
For was it not distinction
To be pearlless
In a colony
Of pearl-oysters?

Mrs. Potts Ascends

Mrs. Potts the Social Climber
Dreamed she made ascent to Heaven
Broke into the Inner Circle
Gave a party to the Angels
All the Notables attended.

Decked in halo made of moonbeams
Wore her wings of solid star-dust
Streaked with sky and rosy sunset
Even God remarked with fervour,
"Mrs. Potts, you look superb."

I Have a Rendezvous with Life

I have a rendezvous with Life
That travels fast as shooting star
And stops the tick of clock.

I have a rendezvous with Life
Within a cluttered city,
Where ragged elbows
Rub with elbows of fine texture,
Where hearts beat high and low
With joy and sorrow,
Where everybody counts and counts.

I have a rendezvous with Life
Within a drawing room,
Where tinkle teacups and small talk,
Where bosoms are half-naked
And souls are fully veiled,
Where teeth are bared in sweetest smile,
Where fox is sheep and sheep is fox,
Beneath the glistening crystal lights.

I have a rendezvous with Life
Within a whirring factory,
Where machines run men,
Where toys and delicacies
Are flavored with sweat and toil,
Where brawn is built and brain is numbed.

I have a rendezvous with Life
Within a lonely farmhouse,
Where the breeze is clean
And men and grain attain full growth,
Where God is on four sides and by the hearth,
Where women gossip openly
And help each other at harvest time
No matter what space of sky
There be between each farm.

Tree in a Canyon

I love to walk
Through a certain city canyon
Flanked by cliffs of dwellings drab
Where grows a tree
On the outer sidewalk.

I do not know the name of the tree
For I am city-bred.

The Death of Pan

On excellent authority
I've heard of how Pan died.

It seems that walking in his sleep
His Majesty awoke
To find himself
Upon a Subway station.
He joined the dance
Thinking it was some frolicking
Of city satyrs.

Life of a City

Numbers and prices of things—
Babies and married couples—
Old ladies and sometimes old men—
Churches, lodging houses, theatres,
Slums and places to eat—
The waiting for the man one step ahead
To drop dead.

Underneath it all
A series of glows and hurts
And equilibriums
That only the person knows
But never shows completely.

The Devil Visits Broadway

In tattered garb of beggar came the Devil
To scorch the blackish mark upon the soul
Of mortals in the City of Cold Hearts.

And as he walked the ill-famed street,
A ragged urchin offered him
His only crust of bread.

In rage the Devil melted back to Hell.

A Lilt

I grasped the greasy subway strap
And read the lurid advertisements
I chewed my gum voraciously
Inhaled strange fumes pugnaciously.
I heard the grating of the wheels
And felt that the chords
Of my city soul
Were in perfect tune.

A Rumbling

I thought I heard the World
Creaking and groaning on its axis.
I looked out from my window
And saw a lusty steamroller
Rattling slowly on its way
Towards the destination
Which it was sure to reach
In due time.

A Thought

Like a brilliant Thought
That rises from its fellows
A bright toy-balloon
Broke from a cluster.

Lifted by a breeze
It soared above white dwellings
To sink into a dingy alley.

A grimy child
Aglow at the beauty of its roundness
Greedily grasped the balloon
And pressed it to his narrow chest.

A vagrant pin
Pierced the rubber bubble
But the child kept the remnant
Prizing it for its color.

Day of Judgment

The next day was to be
The Day of Judgment
And plans were made
For a monstrous brass band.
The papers teemed
With the controversy being waged
As to which churchman would make
The welcoming address
To the great Jehovah.

The people of the slums
Were also excited
And ate an extra piece
Of bread for supper.

Two Voices

A famous singer lay
At the portal of Death.
Bulletins issued hourly
By a staff of specialists
Were read by an anxious world
Shocked at the thought
Of losing their beloved song-bird—
And the price of his
Phonograph records rose.

At the lower end of the city
In a murky room
A foreign woman moaned alone
Over her little boy that was—
“Never no more shall I hear
My dear bambino’s voice.”

The Subway Guard

Pasty-faced and weary-eyed
He sealed the coach
With load of human cattle.

I shouted him, "What station next?"
But twinkling thought inquired me,
"What was he the Life Before?"

He howled me the station's name
But my sub-conscious ear received,
"I was an eagle."

Blasphemy

Overhead the shamefaced stars
Softly scan the street below
Where the shops in splendour sparkle,
Where the signs of theatres dazzle,
As along the gleaming highway
Head-lights come and tail-lights go.

Timidly the Dawn creeps in
And the blasphemed Sun mounts high
Beating vainly on the windows
Of tall buildings where the workers
'Count the debits and the credits
Under lamps with greenish shades.

Neighbors

For years I have lived
In an edifice of stone
But never met my neighbor;
Yet we may lie
Side by side
Forever.

Geographically Speaking

NORTH—

There are as many baby-carriages
Along St. Nicholas Avenue
As there are automobiles
Upon Fifth Avenue.

SOUTH—

Ferries, commuters, shrieks from peanut-stands,
And the breezes from the Bay—
Where one can stand on the Battery wall
And see the Statue and bigger things.

EAST—

At the lower end,
Scarcely enough room to live decently;
At the upper end,
Too much room to live democratically.

WEST—

Giving birth to the "Upper West Side,"
Which covers a multitude of rents;
Far below is Greenwich Village,

The aromatic section of Sixth Avenue ware-
houses,
And the financial district
With its nation-wide tentacles.

A New Yorker is like a chameleon
Camping upon a piece of plaid.

Unto the End

Twenty-four hours to live
As the end of the world is proclaimed.

The millionaire scatters his gold—
The lawyer opens the jails—
The minister goes to a dance—
The atheist starts in to pray—
While the Poet keeps on trading—trading—
Old dreams for new.

Closing the Grill

Crystal chandeliers out-gleaming the stars—
Soft pink shades casting a mellow light—
Napery, white as snow on a roof—
Chinaware, dainty as a baby's birthday ring.

Sleek-haired men with females
Of silks, satins and cosmetics
Patter correctly over the parquet floor
Through the mirrored doorway.

Waiters' imitation shirt-bosoms are displaced
As tables are stripped
Exposing the pine wood
Topped by burlap.

Wall Street

A whirling dervish
In the center
Of a moving merry-go-round
About which vast crowds mill
While the world
Twirls upon its axis.

The Web of Life

Life in a dug-out is a gray monotony
And trifles grow to great importance.
One night we spied a spider
Centered in his flimsy, fine-spun web.
“Oh let the poor dumb devil be,” one lad put in.
“Let’s clean him out and wipe the web,”
Another doughboy said.
“And if we do, he’ll only spin again;”
At which I deftly dealt a blow
With army mitten
That sent the bug
Into the Big Beyond of Insects.
Next dawn a leaden load
Wiped out our dirty dug-out
Which we were forced to build again.

Out of the Line

Wild growths of beard—
Uniforms in shreds—
Shoes clotted with gobs of mud.

Eyes droop wearily,
Suddenly blink hysterically,
And then are set in a stare,
As if we saw the horrible thing
All over again.

Lines that would take Nature
Years to produce,
Seam the region
About the forehead, eyes and mouth.

Men who have received the highest culture
That civilization can give,
Wear a snarling, savage, demented expression.

Is it over?
How is it we live?
And all the gang?
So many faces are missing.
So cold—yet just from Hell.

Khaki and Gold

Upon an upland region of fair France
A field of gold and khaki lay outspread.
Clusters of pure unassuming daisies—
Each flower matched by tawny tunic'd youth.
And as they sprawled upon the dewy grass
The signal softly came for "jumping off."
All eagerly the lads sprang to their feet;
There came a lull to harmonize the line.
A lean and dour Yank stooped low and plucked
A handful of sweet daisies from their home,
And thrust them in the muzzle of his gun
And garlanded his helmet with some more,
Inspiring his buddies to the same.
"Let's give 'em daisies!" rasped an Easterner.
"And Hell!" roared out a boy from the far West.
A long, lithe line swept o'er the open field
To music of the thunderous barrage;
And every here and there a gap was shown
With daisy showers as the lads plunged down.
What scattering of gold and mud and blood!
Quite limp these blessed flowers strewed the
ground.

Where but before the wind and sun had made

Them palpitate in youthful joy of life,
Now they lay quiet in eternal sleep.
With petals stripped from off their graceful stems
Yet there they seemed to rest in peace upon
The ground from which the enemy had fled.

The Citation

Hungry as a Hun
And nervous as a tent
Taut in the wind
The doughboy stood
While a medal
Was pinned upon his breast.
Feeling a speech required
He mumbled:
"You can't eat it
"And you can't smoke it."
Not understanding English
As we Americans speak it
The French officer said;
"Thus are brave soldiers
Rewarded!"

Economics

In France
They fed the horses daily
While at times we doughboys starved.

In the factory
We were taught the value
Of machinery
And how inefficient it was
To get mangled.

I wonder if in Hell
They'll tell us
To be careful of the coal.

Taps

(An accompaniment)

Soldier's sweet—song of sleep—
Long he'll lie with this last lullabye—
Sound the notes—strong and pure—
So they soar with his soul to the sky—

Logs

Two logs met in a fire-place;
Each fell in love at first touch.
"Will you lean on me forever?"
Said the hard cedar wood.
"Nothing shall part us!"
Swore the soft pine wood.
And their flame of love
Ascended as they kissed.
But soon the fire dwindled unto ashes
And their love lay cold upon the hearth.

A Blue Law

One time in Bolshevikia
There was a dreadful drop
In church attendance.
So a law was passed
Charging exorbitant prices
For pew reservations.
From then on
The temples were thronged
And people boasted
Of their frequent trips
To church.

Among the Ravine

Tripping lightly along
The narrow, rocky ravine
That leads up to Success,
Love spied Gold
Plodding sternly ahead.
She tried to pass
And then a struggle followed.
The glint in the eyes of Gold
Bothered Love—
So she was overcome.

The Revelation

In the blessed Beyond
The Soul of a husband
Met the Soul of his wife
And said,
“I never knew you were so beautiful.”

A Mother

She nursed him—
She taught him—
She worked for him—
She visited him in prison.
But he had broken both
The law of God and man
And died for it.
She cried for him—
Then went to church for him.

Woman

A super scientist placed
In his crucible
Vanity and Virtue
Mixed with Temperance
Hoping to produce
A woman.

Many, many times he tried
But failed and finally
Gave up in deep despair.
Success awaited him
If he had thought
Of dropping in a grain
Of Love.

A Rose

Beneath the sun's caresses
Bloomed the rose
Until 'twas plucked and kissed
By one whose red, red lips
Shamed the rose into a bloodless lily.

From amorous embrace that night
The rose was crushed to death.

The Hobo and the Dream Child

In a box-car on a siding
Sat the hobo
Cuddling a puny fire
Made from straw.
The Dream Child toddled up
In shivering rags and said:
"I cannot find a shelter."
The hobo wrapped it
In a burlap bag
And bade it curl
Beside the smoky flame,
Feeding the blaze
With the remaining straw
Which formed his bed.
The Dream Child told him
Of its coming from
A place in which the gold
Was plentiful as water
And gushed through iron pipes
For use by all
Who loved its beauty.
The hobo packed the Dream Child off

On a rumbling fast freight
Bound for its distant country.
He went back to the ashes
Of his straw fire and wondered
Why there wasn't straw enough in the world
For everybody's fire.

As Seen from the Stars

It was in the School of the Stars
Where all the little bright ones
Were learning psychology from a scholar.
“Instinctive actions are displayed,”
Said the High-Light,
“In their purest form
By animals not very high
In the scale of intelligence.
Among the mortals
The men become blind and deaf
To all other impressions
As they follow the trail of gold.”

The Ritual

When he was baptized—
Red-faced and sticky
As a ball of candy
They said:
“Doesn’t he look lovely.”

When he was married—
His evening coat askew
And nervous as a flea
They said:
“Doesn’t he look lovely.”

When he lay in his casket—
Pale and wasted
Like a washed-out painting
They said:
“Doesn’t he look lovely.”

Three Wishes

If I had three wishes to use
To shave the world of its sharp edges,
First, I would wish
That everyone had a sense of humor—
And secondly I'd wish
That my first wish would bear good fruit;
And with my last
I'd wish for three more wishes
So to wish what I had wished before—
All over again.
And thus I'd wish my life away
And die in laughter.

The Weather

He felt that the Sun
Was a glorious flame
And the Air that he breathed
Was exquisite perfume
And Life was very good after all;
So he said to his friend,
“Isn't it a nice day?”

The Arch-Murderer

An arch-murderer slit the throat
Of every lawyer.
When brought before the bar
He pleaded his own case
And drew a sentence
Of thirty days in jail.

A Silly Lad

"'Cause everybody loves and smiles
"And gives at Christmas time
"Why cannot every day be Christmas, Dad?"

"Because a man must work and fight
"To earn a lot of money
"For next Christmas, Son."

"Well, if a man stopped
"Making lots of money
"Wouldn't every day be Christmas?"

"Now, don't be silly, little man,
"When you grow up you'll understand
"Why every day cannot be Christmas."

The Cynic

“There is no God
“There is no Love
“And man is made of clay.”
The youthful Cynic
Spoke and smiled
Like a garden of golden sunbeams.
And then I knew
He was no Cynic.

On the Train

I saw an oak
Sturdy and strong
And said to myself,
"Ah! that is man!"
I glimpsed a bird flying
Swift and sure
And thought again of man.
My brother commuter
Turned to me and said;
"Hope the train's on time;
I've been late so much
The last few days
I'm ashamed to look the boss in the face."

Evolution

A fashionable man
Loved a maiden of a land
Quite uncivilized.

He made the maid his wife
And he taught her all the life
That was civilized.

In a very little while
She adopted all the style
That was civilized.

From the diamonds on her ears
Or the brooch upon her breast
And the load of heavy rings—
No one ever could have guessed
That once she was
Uncivilized.

Philosophy

I sat a siege
With a group of philosophers
And at the finish
Realized
How practical a person
A savage is.

A Cynogram

The unknown Weaver works
A warp of joy
And woof of sorrow.
At different times it is
A radiant rainbow,
A Scotch plaid,
Or a block of sombre black.
This Cloth of Life
Contains few strands
That we, ourselves, insert;
Yet we must wear it.

Growing-Pains

To reach the prime
Of Eternity
Life's children all must suffer
Growing-pains
Which we call
Death.

Sanctuary

In a temple of worship
I sat and waited for the ceremony
Of brotherhood to begin.
A lumbering ox of a person
In entering the pew
Settled his foot upon my own.
If it had not been the House of the Lord
I would have killed the lout.

The Man Who Lived in Jail

Ninety miles south of the Rio Grande
Lies Santa Natalia
Past the waste of mesquite and nopal
Tucked in the valley of Las Huitlacoques
With its charm of sunny, restful remoteness.
The stress and scuffle of Anglo-Saxon America
Seems like a dream of another world
As one yields to the carefree atmosphere
Of the land of yesterday
And the to-morrow that never comes.

The inhabitants of this tiny, lonely oasis
Are a kindly, simple folk,
Unspoiled by commercialism
And untouched by the ebb and flow
Of Mexico's recurrent civil wars.
There is a wealth of pasturage
For their cattle, sheep and goats,
And a fertile soil that yields
Rich crops of corn and sugar cane.

The government is the comandante
And a somnolent garrison of perhaps a dozen
soldiers

Whose arms are single-shot Remingtons
And relic Mausers from the Spanish-American
war.

Enemy parties of guerrillas
Leave them amiably indifferent;
They are quite as willing to shout "viva"
For one side as for the other.

I learned there was but one soul in the hamlet
Who spoke English—
And he was in jail.

I strolled down the ragged trail
And came to an adobe building
Somewhat larger than the ordinary dwelling,
In the shade of which was sprawled
A motley group of soldiers;
I asked one the location of the jail.

"You are looking at it, brother,"
Said he in excellent American.

"Are you from the States?" I asked,
Puzzled over his swarthy complexion.
"I am half Mexican, born in Santa Natalia;
I have lived some years in New York;
I am here because I wish to be."

He was not over thirty-five
But his eyes showed centuries of something;
Slender, and with the fingers of a pianist,
He was not of the adventurer type.
His face seemed strangely familiar
And I felt that I had met him
Somewhere in the past.

“Are you the warden?”

“No,” he answered after a thoughtful pause;
“I am the star prisoner;
After New York was through with me
I came to Santa Natalia;
One night I was drinking in the cantina
And had a row with a man
Who was something in the government.
They put me in here and forgot about me;
That was two years ago.

“I have it very easy;
There is nothing to do
But eat, sleep, and enjoy myself.
When I want a little paseo,
They give me a guard to take me out;
I drift around the town
And people give me
All the eats and cigarettes I need.

The comandante and the priest
Get books for me to read.

"Sometimes when I am lucky with the dice
We put on a little show at the cantina;
Then they send another guard
To bring us both back home.
Nobody cares, because what is the use?"

Manuel, he was called,
Insisting that he had forgotten
His last name.

After the strife and turmoil of New York
This passive village soothed the ragged nerves.
I could understand Manuel—
In Mexico there is no to-morrow.

One morning I idly watched a burro
Who roused himself occasionally
To nibble at the mesquite leaves.
Sleepy chickens taking a sun and dust bath,
Expressed their contentment by faint croonings.
Two children naively unaware of their nakedness,
Played in the shade, building little sand houses,
And trying to entice a dog to play with them;
Finally they tired of play
And stretched out to sleep beside their dog.

The hotel-front was a cascade
Of creeping vines and flowers.
There was no sign of life
Save the fluttering of brilliant butterflies,
The whirring of a hummingbird,
And the drowsy droning of a bumblebee.

Over the dull, twisting trail of yellow,
A distant cloud of dust arose.
"Best come inside, Senor.
I do not know who is coming. It may be . . ."
The voice of Trujillo, the inn-keeper,
Melted into his heavy breathing.
I entered;
The entire family was within
And my host was barring the heavy door.
The windows with their cemented iron bars
Threw shadows around the room.

In the distance sounded a crisp crackling;
From the juzgado
Came the sharp, biting reports of Mausers
And heavier punctuations of old Remingtons
In a lively fusillade.
The firing increased in volume
And then it suddenly ceased.
I heard an outbreak of falsetto Indian yells;
A Trujillo youngster peering from the window

Called to his father that the garrison had
surrendered.

Outside, the victors were riding
Toward the fallen fortress.
They were a fierce-faced group of thirty.
What they lacked in uniformity of dress,
They made up in variety of weapons.
The color-bearer was an Indian girl
With eyes that pranced
Like a pair of jet black steeds.

The comandante and the guerrilla chief
Bartered bows and compliments.
The latter made a grandiloquent address
Filled with such words as "patriotism"
And "honor" and "civilization"
In which he granted amnesty complete
To all of Santa Natalia.
The garrison promptly swore allegiance
To the new government
And the comandante philosophically
Went home for his afternoon siesta.

A few evenings afterward
I listened to the unexcited gossip
In the Café of the Little Drop of Water.

In stumbled Manuel as tipsy as a top,
With desperate eyes and lips compressed;
Thrusting his head upon his folded arms,
He wore the sign of dull despondency.

"Homesick?" I soothingly said.

"Homeless is a better word," he huskily replied.

"Where is your guard?"

"No more guard—no more jail," he sadly said.

"Garcia, the head of the new government

A few days back told me that I was free;

He wanted me to be the comandante.

I begged him to inform me of my crime,

That he should make me leave my jail.

He waved his arms and swore

That never would he confine

One of the country's patriots."

"Were you so fond of the carcel?"

He wanly smiled and with a supercilious touch
As the sky might look at a grain of sand.

"What more could a man desire?

All sorts of leisure and no responsibility—

No pleasure-loving woman

To turn a man into a routine rat;
Nor is there any subway
To crush the soul of a man
Into a paltry pellet."

I said encouragingly:
"Where there's a will there's a jail."

"I've been drunk as a duck," he said,
"And nobody will notice me.
I have picked a fight with many
But not one gave me a chance to shoot."
He sighed and then continued:
"Last evening, I flirted
With the standard bearer of Garcia
And induced her to run away with me.
Hiding her in a cabin deep in the mountains,
I despatched a messenger to Garcia
Telling him of what I had done.
He sent back word
That he was eternally obliged
As he had tried for long
To rid himself of her.
The girl is now in love with me
And wants to work for Manuel
And says she would be happy
If I will beat her daily."

“You do not wish to own her?”
I could not forget
The Indian girl with eyes like prancing blacks.

He had time to look far back into the past.
With his sombre brown eyes before he answered.
“A man can have a woman or happiness—
But not both.”

Days later came the news
That a bold bandit had robbed the paymaster
Of the Sierra Mining Company.
The native officials were full of promises
For the capture of the robber;
Privately they yawned.
Two troopers from the mining village
Eventually wandered over;
They visited the garrison,
Smoked corn-shuck cigarettes,
Chatted and flirted with the señoritas;
Bye and bye they jogged unhurriedly away.

Manuel told me all about it.
He was in lofty spirits;
Not so drunk as usual
And with a hopeful countenance,
He sprawled upon a chair,
Slowly puffing a cigarette.

“When the paymaster’s hand went to his hip,
I almost dropped my Colt and fled into the cactus;
He pulled out a roll of bills
As thick as a burro’s belly.
I told him I was Manuel
From Santa Natalia.
It should be only a question of time
When I will be back in my cozy jail.”

A week passed, which in Mexico
Is as long or as short as you care to make it.
There was no further sign
Of any official interest in the robbery.
Manuel was getting nervous;
He boldly boasted of the hold-up.
His listeners would laugh good-naturedly,
Not raising their eyes from the dominoes.

I prepared to leave for Vera Cruz,
And catch a vessel back
To the City of Worry and Scurry
As Manuel called New York.

He heard of my preparations
And came to see me.
“Leaving?” he slowly said.

“If you would care to go North with me,
I could use you, Manuel;

And I promise to provide you
With plenty paseo."

Manuel shook his head decisively
And faster smoked his corn-shuck cigarette.
He dug into his faded muddy tunic
Bringing forth a musty bag.
"Here is the result of the hold-up.
It is only money—
But there is a reward for its return.
If I brought it myself to the Justice
The company would never receive it
And I would probably be murdered
For knowing too much."

I did not understand and told him so.

"The mining company is Americano;
You tell the superintendent
I am the bandit;
Tell him that I will surrender;
Then see the comandante and let him know
He may obtain the reward
If he but sentence me."

"Why not skip away with the money
And make yourself comfortable?"

His features hardened as he said;
"I did that once,—never again;
Once I was prisoner and slave
To a woman when I was free;
Back in jail all that was past and done with;
I was free from worry
And had only to pass each day
Dreaming and smoking in the shade."

I was struck with a flash of memory.
"Weren't you the teller in the Times Square
National?"

"It was so," he confessed.
"Sing Sing spilled me out two years ago;
The woman got it all
And went away with another,
So I came here and made myself a home."

. . . That evening I brought the soldiers
To make the arrest.

A few days later for the last time
I rode out of Santa Natalia.
Before the jail
Manuel was stretched in the shade
With the soldiers of the garrison,
More one of them than prisoner.

"Look me up in New York some time," I greeted.

"Never again New York for me," he said.

"I am going to be here
Until the next revolution—
Then I will break into jail again."

"Any message for the City
Of Hustle and Bustle?"
I bantered.

"You might tell that poor fool
Who married my woman
That I feel great sorrow for him."

A soldier spoke in Spanish to Manuel;
He rose and said to me:
"It is time to go for our paseo.
We will go to the cantina
And Juan will give us pulque;
Then we shall visit Garcia
And go around to our other friends
For enchiladas and café
And a little chat.
Goodbye!"

Tracks

With a boat for oxen
A youth plowed the sea
Until his beard was white
As the fringe of the waves;
But always would his furrows
Vanish as quickly as they came.

People would say,
"You fool!
You have wasted your life
In doing nothing."

But he would smile and reply,
"No one can make tracks in the sea
Exactly like mine."

The Surf

The waves are ardent lovers
Wooing a sweetheart
With tumultuous kisses;
When she rebuffs
They storm with unrelenting fury
Until she gives herself completely.

Efficiency

America counted its coins
With an efficiency
That made the clink reverberate
Across the ocean.

When the flower of Europe's youth
Became a forest of bayonets,
And the rattle of Death
Rolled over the seas,
We stopped our counting for an instant,
Shrugged our shoulders,
And thumbed our coins more feverishly.

And then we saw strange spots upon the gold . . .
We poured the blood into the scales
And balanced it with sunbeams.

Sunbeams are the Ideals of Nature;
They are fickle things and hard to grasp,
Yet give a happy warmth.

America counted its cartridges
With an efficiency

That made the world reverberate
With wonder.

The sunbeams from a newborn Sun
Tipped the bloody scales of Justice.

America is counting coins again
With an efficiency
That makes the clink reverberate
Across the ocean.

The sunbeams mingle now and then
With the glint of golden metal:
We shall count with greater speed
If we but draw the shade:
Sunbeams are good for the soul
But hard on the eye.

Balance

A certain hod-carrier
For every load of bricks
Would bear a hod of horseshoes
On the other shoulder.
At the top of the ladder
He'd cast the horseshoes
To the ground below
And descend with his pair of hods
Balanced with equal emptiness . . .

Rhymes at times
Are like that.

Usage

I gave some money to a rich man
And he put it in his bank ;
I gave some money to a tattered beggar
And he bought more rags for his back.

Headings

Newsboys seldom read below the headlines:
Tombstones reach no further than the grass.

Gifts

The stars offered a choice of gifts—
A jewel, a tree, or a pretty child.

“I’ll take the jewel,” said the farmer,
“For it will shine forever
And there are many trees and children
But few priceless stones in the world.”

“I’ll take the tree,” said the city man,
“To plant before my door and give me shade;
It will grow like a pretty child
And yet not show ingratitude.”

“We’ll take the child,”
Said the lonely pair;
“For it will make one of three
Where two made nothing before.”

Intelligence

When the ancients planned a voyage o'er the seas
They consulted the oracle at Delphi . . .

Mrs. Fitz lifted the receiver:

"Hello, is this the Weather Bureau?

We are planning a picnic for the orphans;

Tell me, if you please,

What sort of day next Saturday will be?"

Sky in a City

The business man striking his monthly balance
Looked through his office window—
The sky is a bank
And the stars are its fortune.

The poet on the roof of his boarding house—
The sky is a garden of phosphorescent flowers.

Sitting on a park bench with her gentleman friend,
Mamie said:
“Look at the bunch of stars in the sky.
Ain’t it awful pretty!”

The Pervert

He walked home from the office
Through the park
And was seized with a perversion.
He buried his face deep
In the buds of a rose-bush
Inhaling the fragrance with rapture.
Quickly he recovered himself
And glanced around covertly.

A short distance away
A scowling policeman
Twirled his club threateningly.

The Tattler

As the city's white day
Shades into the mauve twilight
A swallow skims across the cornice
Of my cage.

Perhaps he is a woodland scout
Hastening back with the news
That another tree has been planted
Upon the edge of our pavement.
How the leaves in the forest this night
Will rustle with gossip!

Tactics

"Suppose I am behind?
Do I spend it on myself?
I haven't a saucer in the house
And the kids—your kids—
The toes are sticking thru their shoes!
If I don't get ten dollars
You'll get no supper to-night!"
Screams Jane.

"Where do I get the money?
Can I grind it out like a sausage machine?
It's ten for this and ten for that
And now another ten.
Damn it! You'll make me a thief.
Here's five; that's all I got!"
John roars.

Jane snatches as John stalks out
Slamming the door behind him.

On his way to the station John chuckles,
"Fooled the old lady out of five."
Foxy boy that John.

Across the dumbwaiter
Jane boasts to Mrs. Shultz
How she wheedled five from John
When she only needed three.

Birdlings

An out-of-town swallow culling crumbs
From urban cobble-stones—
A sophisticated sparrow pecking worms
Off a luscious landscape.

A country girl with wistful eyes
Before a shop of artificial flowers—
A city maid talking love
To a dainty dandelion.

The Smiths

The gas flame seemed to be fanning itself—
The kitchen was so hot.

Mrs. Smith left the steaming stove
To cool her moist cheek at the fire-escape window;
Surprised to see that the sky was still there
She wondered if there were Smiths on each soft
star.

Mr. Smith shouted from the dining room:
“The soup was good, Ann; I’m ready for the
meat!”

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